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SPECIAL REPORT

THE TURKISH POLITICAL SITUATION

CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY
OFFICE OF CURRENT INTELLIGENCE

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THE TURKISH POLITICAL SITUATION

The political life of Turkey is still under the shadow of the military revolution of May 1960. Behind a relatively unstable civilian political leadership sits an uncertain military high command. These officers are confronted with a dilemma of either turning the government over to a new civilian group which they do not trust, or of trying to maintain in power the present group that not only lacks popular support but gives no indication of being able to generate it. There are some signs, moreover, that hitherto submerged currents of leftist opinion among intelligentsia and labor groups may be coming to the surface.

Historical Background

The government of the Turkish Republic as established by Kemal Ataturk in the early 1920s was to function through political parties. The initial drive for far-reaching social and economic reforms, however, necessitated a single-party structure. The party created by Ataturk was called the Peoples' Party--later changed to Republican Peoples' Party (RPP). By the mid 1940s a somewhat looser structure was possible, and disagreement among the RPP leaders over the emphasis being placed on state ownership of industry and over the slow pace of evolution toward a more open political system led to a split and the formation of the Democrat Party (DP) in 1946. Both the RPP and the DP remained anti-Communist and, after World War II, favored alignment with the West.

While the orthodox Republicans adhered more or less to the rigorous demands for reform through state action that had characterized Ataturk's regime, the Democrats made their appeal to groups which looked for some relaxation of state pressures and interventions in both social and economic spheres--the peasant mass, which still forms the bulk of the Turkish electorate, and urban business interests. Strong peasant support swept the DP into power in the 1950 elections, but the anticipated liberalization of political life failed to materialize.

Once in power, the DP became increasingly restrictive and repressive. The RPP, on the other hand, now became the party demanding greater political freedom and greater caution in economic development, but it remained largely remote from the electorate, whom the Democrats continued to woo with a variety of pork-barrel projects and favored treatment for peasants.

The repressive aspects of the Democrat regime under President Celal Bayar and Premier

Adnan Menderes fell mainly on the press, on educators--especially politically minded university professors--and on the RPP leaders themselves. Thus, while the Democrats retained the sympathies of the rural masses, the intellectual elite of the country was alienated. The overthrow of the regime became certain when it began to use the armed forces and police for purely partisan purposes, such as intimidating RPP rally organizers and breaking up hostile student demonstrations.

When the Menderes government was ousted in May 1960, the act was performed by the armed forces, acting not primarily for themselves, but on behalf of true "constitutionality." Their action was broadly welcomed by the educated classes on that ground. The peasants, however, remained largely indifferent, though not really hostile.

Army's Political Role

The assumption of a political role involved no radical adjustment in the thinking of Turkey's military leaders. Ataturk's revolution itself had sprung from the upper ranks of the Ottoman army, and the military never have regarded themselves as a subordinate arm of the executive branch of the government. The dominant military view has been that the armed forces were the primary guardians of the constitution.

In setting up his political party, Ataturk did not "take the army out of politics," but rather established such an identity of views between the army leadership and the civilian government that it was inconceivable that the army should intervene in any partisan sense. Under these rather special conditions, a tradition that the military were aloof from politics gradually began to take root. However, the breakdown of the single-party system deprived the military of their sense of identity with the civilian leadership of the country.

The real political problems of the military began to appear when the more politically minded among the officers, thoroughly disaffected from all civilian leaders, sought not simply to return to constitutionalism after the 1960 coup, but to bring about another real revolution in the manner of Ataturk. This effort never really got off the ground--although it still has adherents, particularly among the more junior field-grade officers. However, it was pushed just hard enough to help produce 18 months of ineffectual military administration, which sorely tarnished the military's image as a group of efficient, dedicated leaders above the humdrum of ordinary politics.

Post-Coup Civilian Politics

The military coup did not in fact usher in a period of dramatic political change. By the end of 1961, the old political forces, some under new names, had returned to the arena.

INONU GURSEL GUMUSPALA

The Democrat Party of course disappeared as such--Menderes was executed, Bayar and the bulk of the DP leadership imprisoned, and even use of the word "democrat" in any party title was prohibited. Three new parties appeared, however, seeking to fill the vacuum that the DP had left. These were the Justice Party (JP), headed by retired General Gumuspala; the New Turkey Party (NTP), headed by economist Ekrim Alican; and the Republican Peasant Nation Party (RPNP), under the leadership of a former DP dissident, Osman Bolukbasi. The RPNP has since split into two; the orthodox remnant is led by Hasan Dincer. The RPP, the principal beneficiary of the coup, remained largely unchanged.

Thus, at least in appearance, Turkey has a multiparty system on the Western European model. The adoption of proportional representation in national and provincial elections has further encouraged the growth of minor parties and the formation of coalition governments. The first postcoup election resulted in a coalition of the RPP and the JP which foundered after six months on the issue of amnesty for political prisoners. It was followed by the present unsteady arrangement, which places the NTP and the RPNP in a cabinet dominated by the RPP and headed by the latter's venerable leader, Ismet Inonu, companion of Ataturk, his successor as President of Turkey from 1938 to 1950, and the man who is most credited with bringing Turkey from virtual dictatorship under Ataturk to "democracy." General Gursel, who was the front man for the 1960 military coup, is installed as President.

There are clear signs, however, of a trend back to "normal"--i.e., to a two-party system consisting of the RPP and

its old opponents of the DP flying new colors but probably not much changed at heart. In the nationwide local and provincial elections held on 17 November, the NTP and the RPNP showed so poorly that there seems little question that they will merely be splinters. Each won about 14 percent of the popular vote in the 1961 elections for the Assembly (lower house), but together they won less than 10 percent of the vote in the recent regional elections. Their supporters now evidently are gravitating toward the Justice Party, recognized more and more widely as the real heir of the DP, especially in its grassroots organization and local leadership.

The JP won better than 34 percent of the popular vote in the 1961 voting, very close to the 37 percent won by the officially supported RPP. In the recent provincial council elections, the JP won 45 percent to 37 percent for the RPP. Had the 1961 elections been held on a single-constituency simple majority basis, the JP would even then have won nearly half the seats in the lower house.

While the recent elections had no direct bearing on the situation in the national parliament--the Grand National Assembly--there may, as an indirect result, be significant shifts of lower house members as well as senators from the minor parties to the JP camp, unless restrained by military pressure. If national elections were held in the near future, the JP might very well emerge as the majority party.

Dilemma for the Military

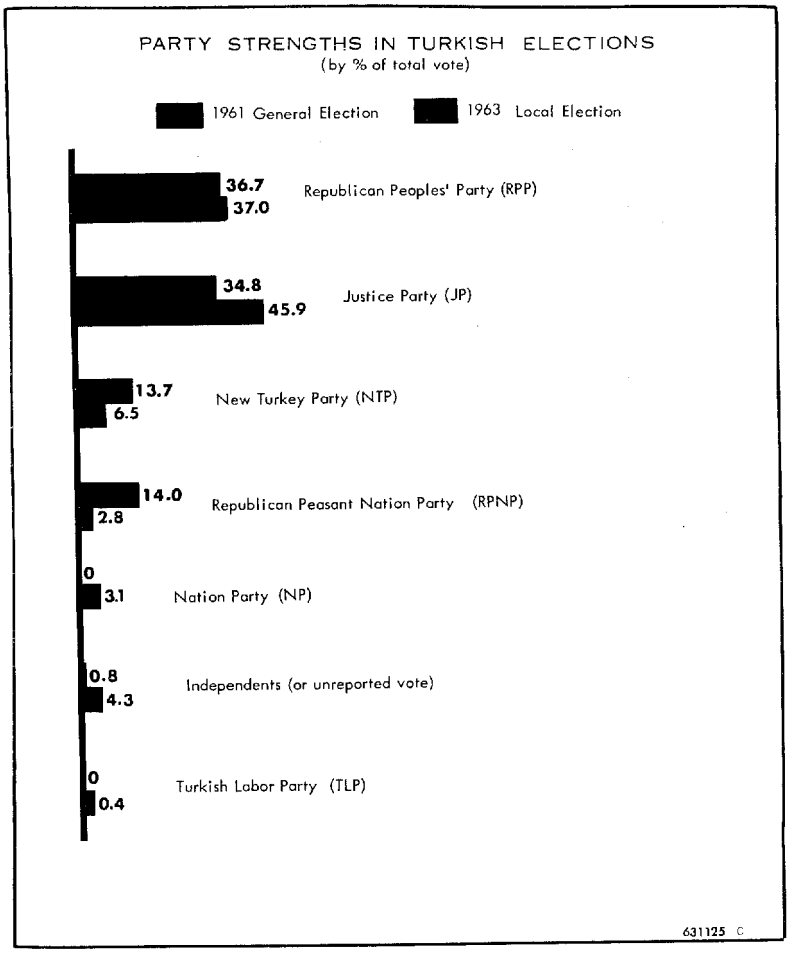
The rise of the JP has placed the military squarely on the back of the tiger. Honest elections are part of the constitutionalism that the military see themselves defending, but how can the men who made the 1960 coup and went out of their way to justify the action during the ensuing months tolerate the return to power of the political heirs of those they overthrew? The question acquires even more point because of the treason trials, executions, and prison sentences that were meted out to DP leaders. Some 150 politicians are still in jail. The possibility that they or their sympathizers would some day seek revenge on the perpetrators of the coup is a recurring concern within the military leadership. The JP's demand last March for a total amnesty and the outspokenness of the JP press have further fostered the military's suspicions.

Under present conditions, the military probably would not accept a JP government, and their view could be enforced. The military command--the chief of the general staff, the chiefs of the ground, air, and naval forces and the commanding generals of the three armies--still holds predominant power, and few major decisions have in fact been taken by Inonu without its sanction.

Time, however, seems to be on the side of the JP, and the military are finding their opposition to that party more difficult to pursue without taking off their mask of constitutionality. Twice in recent months, pressure from the military has been rebuffed in the legislature--once when Assembly deputies would not lift the parliamentary immunity of one of their colleagues whom the military wished to prosecute, and more recently in the election of a JP member as president of the Senate.

The JP leaders themselves express confidence that they can convince the military that they have no desire or intention to revive the past. Moreover, the JP leaders are anxious to gain a toehold on policy-making, and they apparently are willing to accept again a junior role in a coalition with the RPP pending national elections--not regularly scheduled until October 1965.

The JP's prospects for eventually achieving some kind of modus vivendi with the top military leadership are probably good, even though the situation is not without danger if the party pushes too hard, especially on the local scene where recognizable ex-Democrats apparently play a larger role in party affairs than they do in the national leadership. Moreover, the military's unhappy experience at trying to run the country should make the commanders reluctant to intervene again. Another factor which favors letting the civilians handle the problem has been the divisive effect the postcoup experience has had on the military themselves.



There have been two abortive coups led by junior and retired officers since the 1960 coup. The key leader of both attempts was ex-Colonel Aydemir, who apparently participated in early planning for the military takeover but was in Korea with the Turkish contingent when the coup actually occurred. Aydemir,

disgruntled because he had missed the real action, became increasingly critical of the postcoup Inonu government for its failure to make speedy social and economic reforms.

Aydemir's views apparently had wide appeal in high military circles--they recalled the revolutionary dynamism of Ataturk--but the top echelon decided it lacked the necessary popular support to install a regime of the kind Aydemir wanted, and he was retired for continuing to agitate. His second attempt, for which he and three of his lieutenants have been sentenced to death, was an effort to anticipate other plotters whom he suspected of double-crossing him. The top command has become increasingly wary of the younger "wild men" to whom Aydemir appealed, and probably fears that a new military intervention might unleash them. Nevertheless, the command still might take the risk if it felt the alternative--a JP government--was too dangerous to its position.

Emergence of Political Left

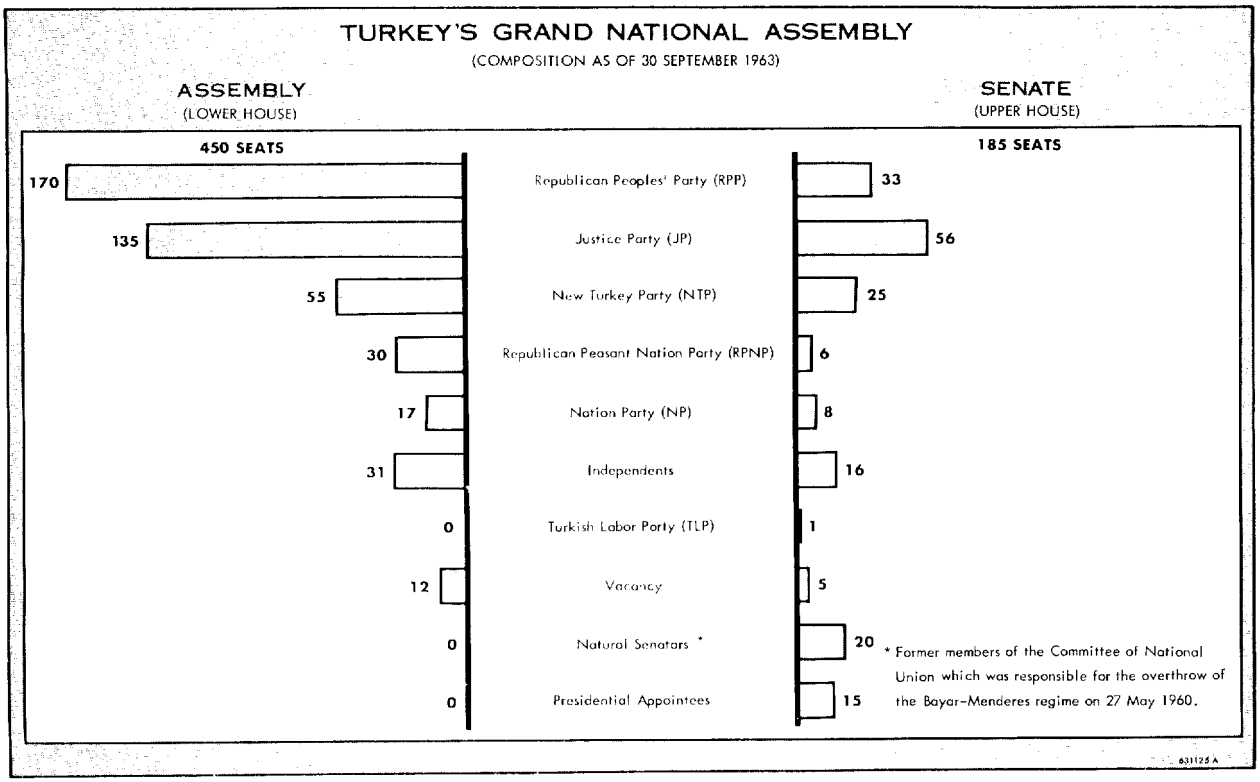
A new and still largely incalculable feature of the Turkish scene is that for the first time since the Communist Party was outlawed in Turkey in 1922, a bona fide political left appears to be developing. The Communist front groups formed in the mid-1940s never attained much popular following, and the term Communism acquired a subversive connotation.

A new Turkish Labor Party (TLP) made up largely of doctrinaire Marxists and young Socialists has been organized and, according to unofficial reports, beat out the NTP and RPNP to run third in Ankara, Istanbul, and Izmir in the recent elections. It has already won two Senators over to its side, and party members seem to anticipate other recruits from among former members of the military revolutionary Committee of National Union who now are lifetime senators and favor radical reform by state action. The TLP, by exploiting "socialist" sentiments that have appeared since the 1960 coup could become a potent political force if unrestrained.

The military appear to have no intention of letting this new group get out of hand. TLP President Mehmet Ali Aybar was warned during the recent campaign against making inflammatory public statements. It seems significant, nevertheless, that educated Turks are beginning to talk and write quite openly about Socialism--a system of social organization previously interdicted in Turkey.

Outlook

The replacement of the present coalition by a new one composed of the JP and RPP or by a national coalition of several parties may help to stabilize the government temporarily. Such coalitions would merely be unions of political necessity, however, that would probably be unable to endure the deep mutual antagonism of the two major groups.



Persistent, though reduced, military antipathy for the JP keeps that party from assuming a dominant role despite its demonstrated popular support. As a coalition partner, the JP would be in a better position to win the confidence of those military leaders who view it only as the reincarnation of the old Democrat Party.

The formation of a new government may be delayed by JP opposition to Inonu as prime minister. Inonu's public image has suffered badly, especially during the past year. Instead of being viewed as the only man whose presence in office keeps the army in the barracks, he now is regarded as the man who makes things what they are, good, bad, or indifferent.

The military reaction to the JP victory on 17 November remains unclear. Certainly the top command realizes now more than ever that merely ousting a regime does not in itself change the political pattern. The high command probably believes, however, that it cannot extricate itself completely, that its only alternatives are to promote a JP-RPP or broader coalition, take control of the government itself, or try to continue as now, facing repeated government crises, economic stagnation, and growing popular antipathy. In any event, the rebirth of a bona fide civilian government without substantial army influence seems a long way off. (CONFIDENTIAL)